

Frequently Asked Questions, February 2019

The What & Why of First Universalist Church and Shir Tikvah Co-location

Why are we considering co-location? What happened to our original plans?

Our capital campaign, *Not for Ourselves Alone: Building an Inclusive Future*, launched in 2016 with a vision to make our building more welcoming and accessible, more useful to our community, and more financially and environmentally sound. We wanted our building to reflect our commitments to racial and environmental justice. First we imagined a new welcome and drop-off center toward the rear of the parking lot. Then architectural review and more thought led us to imagine a more prominent, accessible and welcoming Dupont Avenue entrance. Long looked-for documentation showed that we could build upon the foundation of the Religious Education wing, and we imagined a new third floor full of classroom and meeting spaces. Then, cost came in for a reality check, and we realized that a third floor was not within our reach. All this time, conversations have been happening between the leadership of Shir Tikvah and First Universalist, and we had begun dreaming together about co-location. These conversations grew out of the friendship between Rev. Justin Schroeder and Rabbi Michael Latz who had involved their respective Boards in conversations about strengthening the relationship between our respective congregations. Our two congregations decided to spend September of 2018 through June of 2019 in a time of discernment asking and answering hard questions about finance, structure, and space and program needs, and learning about each other's culture and commitments.

What is the vision for co-location? How will co-location impact our mission?

As people of faith, we are called to live and act out of a prophetic imagination about what is possible as we strive to heal the world and build the Beloved Community. Both of our congregations share commitments to racial justice, ending white supremacy culture, environmental stewardship, and creating spaces that reflect our values and dedication to the community. As a shared house of worship, 3400 Dupont becomes a model for the partnering, collaboration, and new ways of being we hope to see in the world. Finally, by sharing the costs of operating the building, we shore up First Universalist's financial future, ensuring our ability to continue living into and amplifying our mission.

Are we merging with Shir Tikvah?

No, we will each retain our own faiths, identities, traditions and cultures. We will have opportunities to learn about each other's cultures and traditions, and work together for racial and social justice.

What are the current plans for the building space?

We will achieve almost all of what we hoped for in our original vision but in a different form. The Dupont entrance and atrium will be enhanced, and offices will be moved to the first floor of the Education Wing. The second floor will consist of remodeled meeting rooms and classrooms. The third floor will house a large worship space in the round with movable chairs. It will also house some offices or meeting rooms and a bridge to the balcony and Arches rooms, which makes these areas accessible. The plans include all of the improvements we imagined for our current Sanctuary: new carpeting, hearing loop, an accessible stage/chancel, new A/V, paint, and improved lighting.

Why do we need a third floor worship space? How will this help First Universalist meet our needs and goals?

Shir Tikvah desires to continue the worship traditions developed in their current synagogue (our former building) on Girard Avenue. Congregants love worshipping in the round and developed a joyful tradition of clearing the chairs after services and setting up tables for food and fellowship. This third floor space will be a shared space that we can use outside of Shir Tikvah worship times (Friday nights and Saturday mornings). For our use, it will be great space for large meetings or workshops, religious education and adult programming, or smaller services. It should also be an attractive space for external community events or artistic performances, fulfilling our goal of creating space that is useful to the larger community.

Will First Universalist be able to meet our Religious Education & Adult Spiritual Development program needs?

Yes, we will have somewhat more space with the plans with Shir Tikvah than we would have if we did not co-locate and build the third floor. One big advantage is the third floor addition allows a bridge or walkway to the balcony and Arches room, making these previously little-used spaces accessible.



Won't parking be an even greater problem than it is now?

The practical advantage of co-locating with a Jewish congregation is that their services are held Friday evenings and Saturday mornings. Currently, Shir Tikvah holds its religious education programming on Sunday mornings. They would commit to changing this schedule if we co-locate. Nevertheless, there may be times when both congregations sponsor big events at the same time and we will need to revisit the idea of a “park and shuttle” in a neighborhood lot or renting space on occasion at Temple Israel or First Unitarian Society for one of us if we are both holding a very large event. We also will need to invite the neighborhood into the communication circle at an appropriate point to discuss the impact of increased use of the building on the neighborhood.

Will Shir Tikvah be our tenant or a co-owner?

Shir Tikvah will most likely be a co-owner of our building. They will invest or “buy into” the building by raising funds through the sale of their own building and by raising funds through their own capital campaign. Ownership may not be 50/50 at the start; ideally we would work toward parity over time.

What financial and legal structures will be required to make co-location happen?

We have chartered a Financial and Legal Team to explore these issues; this team consists of members from both Shir Tikvah and First Universalist with relevant financial, legal, and business expertise. One possible model is creating a new entity that owns the building; the building or new entity is then managed by a board consisting of members of both congregations and perhaps an outside board member. Custodial staff, a receptionist and scheduler may be shared staff reporting into the new entity. The two congregations share operating costs.

What is the exit strategy if this doesn't work out?

There is no way to eliminate all risk, but we're looking at ways to mitigate risk. We expect this to be a very long term relationship – twenty-five years or more. We will have a constructive operating model and an agreed upon process for resolving conflict. We will determine a process to use if one party decides to terminate the relationship. We have learned about some successful, long term partnerships using a similar model.

Will we have a chance to meet the Shir Tikvah congregation?

We anticipate several opportunities to interact with Shir Tikvah congregants and to learn more about each other's respective cultures and traditions over the coming years. We've held one highly successful workshop with leaders from both congregations and are eager to do more.

When will we know more and how will I find out?

We will hold an update session on **Sunday, March 10** after the 2nd service, and more detailed information and feedback sessions on the following dates:

Thursday, April 11, 10 a.m.–noon

Monday, April 15, 7–8:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 25, 7–8:30 p.m.

Sunday, May 5, 1–2:30 p.m.

Sunday, May 19, 1–2:30 p.m.

How can I provide input?

You may give feedback at the update and information sessions, to a Senior Co-Minister or Board member, or via an online form at: <https://tinyurl.com/colocationinput>

How will a decision be made about co-location?

The various working teams will give their recommendations to the Board of Trustees. The Board and Senior Co-Ministers will ultimately decide on the terms, jointly developed with Shir Tikvah, and will bring a proposal to the congregation at our annual meeting on **Sunday, June 2**. This initial proposal will cover the major elements of the agreement, but will not cover every detail of the final agreement. *Please take advantage of the updates and information sessions to be well informed!*

